



MALURUS CYANEUS: Vieill.

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MALURUS CYANEUS, Vieill.

Blue Wren.

Sylvia cyanea, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 545.

Motacilla cyanea, Gmel. Syst. Nat., vol. i. p. 991.

————— *superba*, Shaw, Nat. Misc., pl. 10.

Superb Warbler, Shaw in White's Voy., pl. in p. 256, upp. fig.—Ib. Gen. Zool., vol. x. p. 754, pl. 58.—Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. vii. p. 117, but not the plate.

Malurus cyaneus, Vieill. Gal. des Ois., p. 265. pl. 163.—Vig. and Horsf. in Linn. Trans., vol. xv. p. 221.—Jard. and Selb. Ill. Orn., vol. ii. pl. 72. fig. 3.—Gould, Syn. Birds of Australia, Part I.

Superb Warbler, *Blue Wren*, etc., of the colonists.

OF the lovely group of birds forming the genus *Malurus*, the present species is the oldest known, being that figured in White's Voyage to New South Wales, under the name of Superb Warbler, a term by which the bird is still familiarly known in Australia. It is abundantly dispersed over every portion of the colony of New South Wales, and I observed it to be equally numerous on the plains of the interior to the northward; but how far its range may extend in that direction, can only be determined when those parts of the continent shall have been fully explored. I also killed specimens in South Australia, which I then believed to be identical with the present bird; but on comparison since my return, I find them to be more nearly allied to the *Malurus longicaudus*, at the same time possessing characters different from either; a further knowledge of the South Australian bird is therefore necessary, before I can determine to which it is referable, or if it may not be distinct from both.

The kind of country to which the *Malurus cyaneus* gives preference is of a wild and sterile character, thinly covered with low scrubby brushwood, especially localities of this description situated near the borders of rivers and ravines. During the months of winter it associates in small troops, of from six to eight in number, probably the brood of a single pair; it is of a very wandering disposition, and although never migrating to any great distance, is continually traversing the district in which it was bred, retiring at night-fall to roost in the accustomed haunt. At this period of the year the plumage of the sexes is so nearly alike, that a minute examination is requisite to distinguish them, and hence has risen the supposition that there was but one male to several females. The old males, however, have at all seasons the bill black, whereas the young males during the first year, and the females, have this organ always brown; the tail-feathers also, which with the primaries are only moulted once a year, are of a deeper blue in the male than in the other sex. As spring advances they separate into pairs, the male undergoing a total transformation, not only in the colour, but also in the texture of its plumage; indeed, a more astonishing change can scarcely be imagined, its plain and unassuming garb being thrown off for a few months and another assumed, which for resplendent beauty is hardly surpassed by any of the feathered race, certainly by none but the Humming-birds and Cotingas of America: nor is the change confined to the plumage alone, but extends also to its habits; in fact, its whole character and nature appear to have received a new impulse; the little creature now displaying great vivacity, proudly showing off its gorgeous attire to the utmost advantage, and pouring out its animated song unceasingly, until the female has completed her task of incubation, and the craving appetites of its newly-hatched young call forth a new feeling, and give its energies a new direction. After satisfying myself that the gaily-adorned plumage of the male is only assumed during the summer season, I endeavoured to ascertain at what periods these changes take place, and I found that the adult males generally begin to assume their blue dress in March, and to throw it off again for their winter garb in August; but although the greater number undergo their periodical change simultaneously, still individuals may occasionally be met with in their brilliant plumage even in the depth of winter, owing to some peculiar circumstance having caused them to retain it later than usual, or having induced them to assume it at a much earlier period.

During the winter months no bird can be more tame and familiar, frequenting the gardens and shrubberies of the settler, and hopping about their houses as if desirous to court, rather than shun, the presence of man; but the male, when adorned with his summer plumage, becomes more shy and retiring, appearing

to have an instinctive consciousness of the danger to which his beauty subjects him ; nevertheless they will frequently build their little nest and rear their young in the most populous places. Several broods are reared annually in the Botanic Garden at Sydney, and I saw a pair busily employed in constructing their nest in a tree close to the door of the Colonial Secretary's Office in that town. The short and rounded wing incapacitates it for protracted flight, but the amazing facility with which it is enabled to pass over the surface of the ground fully compensates for this deficiency : this mode of progression is scarcely to be called running, but is rather a succession of bounding hops, performed with great rapidity : while thus employed its tail is carried perpendicularly or thrown forward over the back ; in fact, except during flight, this organ is rarely, if ever, carried horizontally.

The breeding-season continues from September to January, during which period at least two, if not three, broods are reared : the young of one being scarcely old enough to provide for themselves, before the female again commences laying : independently of rearing her own young, she is also the foster-parent of the Bronze Cuckoo (*Chalcites lucidus*), a single egg of which species is frequently found deposited in her nest ; but by what means, is, as in the case of the European Cuckoo, unknown.

The nest, which is dome-shaped, with a small hole at the side for an entrance, is generally constructed of grasses, lined with feathers or hair : the site chosen for its erection is usually near the ground, in a secluded bush, tuft of grass, or under the shelter of a bank. The eggs are generally four in number, of a delicate flesh-white, sprinkled with spots and blotches of reddish brown, which are more abundant, and form an irregular zone at the larger extremity : they are eight lines long by five and a half broad.

The song is a hurried strain impossible to describe, but somewhat resembling that of the Wren of Europe, a bird to which the *Mahuri* also assimilate in many of their actions.

The stomach is muscular, and the food consists of insects of various kinds, collected on the ground, the trunks of fallen trees, etc.

The male in summer has the crown of the head, ear-coverts and a lunar-shaped mark on the upper part of the back light metallic blue ; lores, line over the eye, occiput, scapularies, back, rump and upper tail-coverts velvety black ; throat and chest bluish black, bounded below by a band of velvety black ; tail deep blue, indistinctly barred with a darker hue and finely tipped with white ; wings brown ; under surface buffy white, tinged with blue on the flanks ; irides blackish brown ; bill black ; feet brown.

The female has the lores and a circle surrounding the eye reddish brown ; upper surface, wings and tail brown ; under surface brownish white ; bill reddish brown ; feet fleshy brown.

The Plate represents two males and a female with the nest, the former engaged in feeding a young Cuckoo.